

The end of the Kaniv Four?

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"I don't like it when you call us "the Kaniv Four", though the title is nice... Better call us "the Four from the Monk's Hill" (Oleksandr Tkachenko, Ukraina Moloda, August 31, 1999)

Three days before "the Kaniv Four" announced the establishment of the block, it seemed that nobody had any intention to join forces in the race. Oleksandr Moroz predicted that at the end of September or in early October presidential candidates registered by the Central Election Commission at the demand of the Supreme Court, will withdraw from the race "in order not to give grounds for speculations with legitimacy of their registration" and avoid the inevitable failure and the loss of moral authority. According to the Socialist leader, a number of "new" candidates already benefited from the race by means of attracting attention to themselves. Furthermore, he told the journalist there was no alliance between him, Yevhen Marchuk or any other presidential candidate who had signed the agreement "On Fair Election" several days before. He was quoted shortly later as stating that no union with Yevhen Marchuk was possible.

On the eighth anniversary of Ukraine's independence, three "favorites" of the presidential race: Socialist leader Oleksandr Moroz, speaker of the parliament Oleksandr Tkachenko, former Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk and a new name in Ukraine's "big" politics, mayor of Cherkassy Volodymyr Oliynyk announced their decision to act jointly in the presidential campaign and stressed that a single candidate nominated by the "Kaniv Four" would be able to win the presidency in the first round. They described the polling day as a "turning day in the history of Ukraine" but refrained from naming their candidate and denied the potential top positions in the would-be government had been already divided between the participants of the "Kaniv Four".

For Oleksandr Tkachenko, the decision to join the anti-Kuchma coalition could be motivated by the offence the speaker took after being denied the floor and not invited to sit in the presidium of the official celebration of the Independence day. On the eve of the official ceremony, he was joined by Oleksandr Moroz, Yevhen Marchuk and the Communist leader Petro Symonenko in the parliament to discuss organizing an "alternative" event and issuing a joint statement calling on the incumbent president to resign and withdraw from the race. Shortly after the meeting began, Petro Symonenko stated he needed to "confer with the comrades" and left for good. Mr. Symonenko hardly had any choice: sensitive Communist voters and competitors for leadership in his own party would have never forgiven him an alliance with Yevhen Marchuk, supported by right-wingers, from moderate national democrats to hard-line nationalists. Hence, the three presidential hopefuls left for Kaniv, where the icon of Ukrainian statehood Taras Shevchenko is buried on local landmark, the Monk's Hill. In Cherkassy, they were joined by another presidential candidate, a leader of the Association of Ukrainian cities and mayor of Cherkassy Volodymyr Oliynyk, hardly known to anyone outside a close policy-making community. The unexpected transformation of the "Kaniv Three" into the "Kaniv Four" caused the delay with the issue of the group's statement till August 25.

Almost immediately after the "Kaniv Four" statement was released, President Leonid Kuchma announced the new alliance "reminded him of the Ge-Ka-Che-Pe" (i.e., the "State Committee on Emergency", the plotters in the August 1991 coup d'etat) and told a press conference the four presidential candidates were proposing a coup d'etat while accusing the incumbent president of dictatorship.

Being aware of the fact that their chances for success without Petro Symonenko remain questionable, all members of the "Kaniv Four" but Yevhen Marchuk argued the Communist leader would be willing to join or at least had made no negative comments about the new alliance. While saying so, neither of them mentioned the fact that should Symonenko have joined them, he would have become the strongest single candidate and, according to the idea of their alliance, they would have to withdraw from the race in his favor.

Unexpected support for the idea of the "Kaniv Four" came from Mr. Symonenko's internal rival for party leadership, leader of Crimean Communists and speaker of the Crimean parliament Leonid Grach, who described the alliance as "just the beginning" and predicted it would be joined by other politicians "sharing different views". The uttered support by his competitor was yet another reason for Mr. Symonenko to refrain from joining the group.

Officially, the "Kaniv Four" was supposed to announce the name of their single candidate in October, but give the voters the chance to decide whom they wanted to support first. In order to do that, the

candidates agreed to have independent opinion polls and compare their respective rankings before the single candidate is nominated. As each of the candidates had his own "poll", no wonder that results were rather contradictory and each of them presented the outcome favoring him as the most "supported" candidate. The internal conflict between the presidential hopefuls entered a new phase. The credibility of the "Kaniv Four" was substantially undermined by the fact that from the very start the candidates except Mr. Oliynyk have told their respective constituencies they were not going to withdraw in favor of any of their allies. Leaders of their respective campaign staffs were even more frank, quoting radical differences between the candidates and their personal political ambitions. Another wrong step made by the "Kaniv Four" was their expectation that Petro Symonenko could be persuaded to join them. Instead, Petro Symonenko expressed his attitude to the alliance bluntly: "my personal position is that candidates should draft such documents and discuss their parameters themselves, but not immediately sign drafts, proposed by somebody else. The Communist Party should also not be silent about the fact that some of the presidential candidates were involved in ruining Ukraine and that deepest social and economic crisis the country has been forced into". "I never got answers to any of five questions I asked the "Kaniv Four", said Symonenko at a meeting with his voters. He explained that his questions dealt with the chance in the system of power, not "removal of one individual", as well as privatization, sales of land, a union with Russia and Belarus, relations with the IMF, development of science, culture, education and "spirituality". He argued that another factor that stopped him from joining the alliance was unwillingness to be in the same block with "tough anti-Communist" Volodymyr Oliynyk and Yevhen Marchuk. However, Mr. Symonenko realized that running against another left-winger in the run-off could seriously disorient the left voters. "Obviously, if the three of us [i.e. Symonenko, Moroz and Tkachenko] get over 50 percent of the vote, it is clear that we will take a joint political decision on who should go for the run-off. In such a case the victory of a left candidate is inevitable", he said. If opinion polls mean anything at all, it is not hard to guess it is Mr. Symonenko who has the best chance to become that left candidate.

From the very start, Yevhen Marchuk, whose presence in the "Kaniv Four" was resented by a large number of his supporters, particularly in the western Ukraine but hardly gave him new potential voters in the east, was rather skeptical about the alliance's prospects to nominate the single candidate, as promised, two weeks before the polling day. In early September, he was the first to predict that the "Kaniv Four" could transform into a "Kaniv Three" or even a "Kaniv Two". He also doubted that Petro Symonenko would ever join the group, given the Communist party's relatively large "guaranteed" electorate. Meanwhile, Oleksandr Tkachenko did not exclude the possibility that the group could be joined not only by Symonenko, but also by Natalia Vitrenko - an idea that could hardly be treated otherwise than "wishful thinking" by anybody who knew about Mrs. Vitrenko's attitude to her former boss Oleksandr Moroz.

While the "Kaniv Four" tried to look united and confident to the voters, internal contradictions remained and often surfaced in their comments and publications in their press. Then, surprised potential voters could read Oleksandr Tkachenko's recollections about the time when he was "the first secretary" of a local Communist party committee and "Moroz worked in my technical school". Oleksandr Moroz's newspaper, the *Tovarishch*, published a study on "Who and How Broke Up the KGB". The day before Oleksandr Moroz had to go to hospital for some urgent treatment, Yevhen Marchuk's *Den* published an article that argued in favor of mandatory medical tests every candidate should undergo before running for presidency. In early September, Volodymyr Oliynyk publicly stated he was "the only one of the four who is not responsible for what is going on today" as he had never occupied "high offices" and, therefore, could expect more trust of voters. He denied he had signed an agreement with left-wingers, arguing that "the division into the right and the left is rather conditional" and "it is very difficult to please a voter in the ideological sense". He was rather realistic about any of the candidate's willingness to give up in favor of a competitor and admitted that giving one's potential votes to the other candidate was "a myth", since even if asked by "their" candidate, voters might not want to go and vote as they were told. Meeting voters, Ivan Boky, MP and official representative of Oleksandr Moroz's staff, publicly criticized Oleksandr Tkachenko for breaking up the alliance of the Socialist party and the Peasants' party after the parliamentary elections, and stated that "Tkachenko, in fact, is supported by the 'fat cat' faction". Talking to journalists at the end of September, Oleksandr Moroz said: "I don't care who will be with me in the run-off, since I can say for sure that I will win the election". His main argument, notwithstanding the commitment to agree on the "single candidate" with his Kaniv Four allies, has always been "vote for anyone and you'll have Kuchma again. Vote for me and we will have a chance to make the current regime resign and face liability for its actions". The statement was treated by Oleksandr Tkachenko philosophically: "If I say I will be the single candidate, this means I have a good reason to say so. If Oleksandr Moroz says that, it means he has a good reason, too."

After the formation of the alliance, its members focused on convincing the society that they were the only alternative to the "regime" and that they would do their best to prevent falsification of the election outcome or disruption of the president. At the end of September, Yevhen Marchuk told the press no other candidates besides the members of the "Kaniv Four" were expected to join the group. He also added that he would leave the group should Petro Symonenko decide to join, as he and Mr. Symonenko had "too different views". His campaign staff activists also repeatedly announced that national democrats would never vote for either Tkachenko or Moroz.

Oleksandr Tkachenko, who has been consistent in his efforts to convince potential voters and his colleagues-competitors that he had the strongest chances to win, announced the final decision on the single candidate to be nominated by the "Kaniv Four" by mid-October. According to Tkachenko, the real aggregate ranking of the four presidential candidates - Marchuk, Moroz, Oliynyk and Tkachenko - was within 43 and 67 percent in the first round, while Leonid Kuchma did not have more than 30 to 40 percent. He argued that Communist leader Petro Symonenko would hardly agree to take a key position in Leonid Kuchma's next government and stated that his "heart told" him Symonenko would finally join them. Later on, he admitted that the "Kaniv Four" had conferred not only about nominating the single candidate, but also about the division of top-ranking positions that would be available to the future winner's allies. Oleksandr Tkachenko showed no intention to withdraw from the race either, stating that his bid for presidency concerns not only him personally, but his Peasants' party that had nominated him. "I will not take this decision [i.e., to withdraw from the race] on my own. Meanwhile, according to some sources, some local organizations of the Peasants' Party were preparing to encourage their members to support Petro Symonenko.

A few successful actions of the "Kaniv Four" included the invitation of representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly to monitor the observance of the equal access rule during the election campaign. The monitors' conclusions about the status of the media freedom and the observance of the equal access rule may be used by the "Kaniv Four" to challenge the legitimacy of the election outcome. On October 18, Ukrainian media reported about "the Russian trace" in the race, arguing that Oleksandr Moroz had visited Moscow to meet Russian Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov and leader of the Otechestvo, mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov, known for his anti-Ukrainian statements in connection with the status of the Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet. Later on, he insisted that during his negotiations with Zyuganov "there was not even a hint for him to influence the position of Ukrainian Communists". Shortly afterwards, the visit of Gennady Zyuganov's deputy V. Kuptsov to Ukraine provoked speculations that the "number two" in the Russian Communist party came to convince the Ukrainian "comrades" to support Oleksandr Moroz. The rumor was refuted by Mr. Kuptsov himself, who told Ukrainian voters that "the CPRF leadership believes your party leader Petr Nikolayevich Symonenko and sincerely wishes him to win the presidential election. This victory, no doubt, will inspire patriotic forces of Russia in the struggle for removal of the Yeltsin anti-people regime." Earlier on, Oleksandr Moroz's assistant Yuri Lutsenko announced that the visit of the "CPRF purse" Kuptsov had occurred "in the way of understanding by the CPRF leader Gennady Zyuganov the necessity to nominate a single candidate for the presidency of Ukraine from all Ukrainian opposition - not just left-wing - forces" but said Mr. Moroz had not met the guests from Russia that time.

By early October the Kaniv Four adopted yet another agreement that outlined principles of the alliance and mutual behavior after the nomination of the single candidate, before and after the polling day.

However, the text of the agreement has not been made public, so journalists, observers and voters had to trust the candidates' words. According to Volodymyr Oliynyk, the selection will be based on "rating and factor that will give an answer to the question whether that figure will be "winnable". "Not only we will name one candidate, but will write responsibilities of each [of us] in a new way", he said.

According to Yevhen Marchuk, the new agreement outlined "coordination of the candidates' actions up to the formation of governmental structures, legislative initiatives and the correlation "the president - the government - the parliament". Oleksandr Tkachenko concluded by stating that "you will know the candidate between the 6th and the 10th of October. The selection principle is known to the four of us. And it is not necessary to disclose it to others."

However, neither Symonenko nor the Rukh candidates joined the Kaniv Four and, notwithstanding the explicitly announced support of Oleksandr Moroz's bid by the Ukrainian official trade unions, no single candidate was announced on October 12. Oleksandr Tkachenko, who led the coalition's press conference and a few days before described the Kaniv Four as "a team that will ensure overcoming the crisis in the country" in accordance with his "National Program for Renaissance of Ukraine" and promised "relatively clean" local bureaucrats they would keep their jobs after the change of power, stated the allies had "generally agreed" on the single candidate but would not name him right away. Oleksandr Moroz traditionally referred to "meetings" with Petro Symonenko and reasons to "count on his support".

A few days after the passed nomination "deadline", the allies announced the transformation of the Kaniv Four into a "3+1" option, with Yevhen Marchuk continuing to run independently, and the other three supporting Oleksandr Moroz though not withdrawing from the race. The official explanation for the decision was that Moroz and Marchuk had most of their supporters in the east and the west, respectively. The withdrawal of Moroz in favor of Marchuk would give the former's votes in the east to Petro Symonenko, while the withdrawal of Marchuk would raise support for Leonid Kuchma in the west. According to the candidates, they remained in the race in order to keep the immunity, as they feared persecution and attacks. Although it was announced that some of the candidates might withdraw before the deadline of October 27, all of them stated they were prepared to "go till the end".

Paradoxically, Now after Petro Symonenko does not have to support either Marchuk or Oliynyk in case he decides to join the rest of the key left-wingers, he may find it easier to do so, especially in the run-off if he is not one of the top two candidates after the first round.

As Vyacheslav Pikhovshek says now, any politician can envy Leonid Kuchma for having fourteen so strong and determined opponents. Indeed, of the fourteen presidential candidates who currently challenge the incumbent president's bid for re-election, too many have personal ambitions but lack both skills and will for coalition building, while the few having substantial popularity and political backing announce they have joined forces for achieving a strategic goal, but later undermine credibility in their effort by making mismatched statements and finally demonstrating that personal ambitions are stronger than the desire to change the power in this state. As a result, the Kaniv Four position has been weakened without the pressure from the outside, leaving Ukrainian voters as skeptical as ever about prospects for united action of the Ukrainian opposition.